

Article Display Date: 4/26/2006 12:00 AM

Nurses train new pediatric care rookies

Recruits aided in tough job

Nikki Cobb, Staff Writer
San Bernardino County Sun

Pediatric acute-care nursing caring for the sickest, most fragile patients can take a heavy toll on a nurse fresh out of school, just beginning his or her career.

Between 50 percent and 60 percent drop out in their first year in the demanding specialty. It's too difficult, they say, to watch children suffer and die daily.

"It's true there are enormous demands . . . but it can also be one of the most rewarding helping parents" through such crises, said Vicki Bermudez, a former neonatal intensive-care nurse.

Bermudez, who now works as a regulatory-policy specialist for the California Nurses Association, said that normally a nurse has one patient but with newborns there are two: the baby and the parent(s), which adds to the pressure.

But a program by the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board aims to keep those nurses on the job at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital by giving them emotional support and additional training.

A similar program, launched two years ago also at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital, reduced the attrition rate to just 10 percent.

In the program, experienced nurses joined new recruits, helping them with technical and medical questions. The student also will have a mentor, someone to touch base with periodically and lend a sympathetic ear.

The \$248,000 program, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, will come from a pool of potential applicants nationwide, and selected by Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.

"It's a very intensive environment to work in," said Barbra Halsey, director of the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board. "The question became, `how do you deal with this attrition in a competent, professional matter.' "Hopefully, what we're doing is impacting the number of those choosing to stay.

California is suffering a dire shortage of nurses, according to experts. Halsey said nurses in such a mentally taxing specialty pediatric intensive care are especially tough to recruit into.

" working with them, giving them the hands-on day-to-day support . . . hopefully what we're doing is impacting the number who choose to stay," Halsey said.